

'Screams Without Words': How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7

From the [New York Times](#). This is a substantial article, not behind the paywall; I recommend you read it in full, with discretion.

At first, she was known simply as “the woman in the black dress.”

In a grainy video, you can see her, lying on her back, dress torn, legs spread, vagina exposed. Her face is burned beyond recognition and her right hand covers her eyes. The video was shot in the early hours of Oct. 8 by a woman searching for a missing friend at the site of the rave in southern Israel where, the day before, Hamas terrorists massacred hundreds of young Israelis.

One family knew exactly who she was – Gal Abdush, mother of two from a working-class town in central Israel, who disappeared from the rave that night with her husband. As the terrorists closed in on her, trapped on a highway in a line of cars of people trying to flee the party, she sent one final WhatsApp message to her family: “You don’t understand.”

Based largely on the video evidence – which was verified by The New York Times – Israeli police officials said they believed that Ms. Abdush was raped, and she has become a symbol of the horrors visited upon Israeli women and girls during the Oct. 7 attacks.

Israeli officials say that everywhere Hamas terrorists struck – the rave, the military bases along the Gaza border and the kibbutzim – they brutalized women.

A two-month investigation by The Times uncovered painful new details, establishing that the attacks against women were not isolated events but part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence on Oct. 7. Relying on video footage, photographs, GPS data from mobile phones and interviews with more than 150 people, including witnesses, medical personnel, soldiers and rape counselors, The Times identified at least seven locations where Israeli women and girls appear to have been sexually assaulted or mutilated.

Four witnesses described in graphic detail seeing women raped and killed at two different places along Route 232, the same highway where Ms. Abdush's half-naked body was found sprawled on the road at a third location.

And The Times interviewed several soldiers and volunteer medics who together described finding more than 30 bodies of women and girls in and around the rave site and in two kibbutzim in a similar state as Ms. Abdush's – legs spread, clothes torn off, signs of abuse in their genital areas.

Many of the accounts are difficult to bear, and the visual evidence is disturbing to see.

The Times viewed photographs of one woman's corpse that emergency responders discovered in the rubble of a besieged kibbutz with dozens of nails driven into her thighs and groin. *That took time and preparation and is a level of unusual sadism (is there a 'usual, common or garden' sadism?)*

The Times also viewed a video, provided by the Israeli military, showing two dead Israeli soldiers at a base near Gaza who appeared to have been shot directly in their vaginas. *Earlier this year I read Anthony Beevor's Berlin: The Downfall which covers the Red Army's use of rape as a weapon of war as they campaigned across eastern Germany in 1945. But so far as the evidence used in that book shows they did nothing like this, or not on this scale.*

Hamas has denied Israel's accusations of sexual violence. Israeli activists have been outraged that the United Nations Secretary General, António Guterres, and the agency U.N. Women did not acknowledge the many accusations until weeks after the attacks.

The Israeli police have acknowledged that, during the shock and confusion of Oct. 7, the deadliest day in Israeli history, they were not focused on collecting semen samples from women's bodies, requesting autopsies or closely examining crime scenes. At that moment, the authorities said, they were intent on repelling Hamas and identifying the dead.

A combination of chaos, enormous grief and Jewish religious duties meant that many bodies were buried as quickly as possible. . .In the aftermath of the attack, police officials said, forensic examiners were dispatched to the Shura military base to help identify the hundreds of bodies – Israeli officials say around 1,200 people were killed that day.

The examiners worked quickly to give the agonized families of the missing a sense of closure and to determine, by a process of elimination, who was dead and who was being held hostage in Gaza. According to Jewish tradition, funerals are held promptly. The result was that many bodies with signs of sexual abuse were put to rest without medical examinations, meaning that potential evidence now lies buried in the ground. International forensic experts said that it would be possible to recover some evidence from the corpses, but that it would be difficult.

Many volunteers working for ZAKA, the emergency response team, are religious Jews and operate under strict rules that command deep respect for the dead. "I did not take pictures because we are not allowed to take pictures," said Yossi Landau, a ZAKA volunteer. "In retrospect, I regret it."

Adil Haque, a Rutgers law professor and war crimes expert ...

said "Very often sex crime cases will be prosecuted years later on the basis of testimony from victims and witnesses. The eyewitness might not even know the name of the victim," he added. "But if they can testify as, 'I saw a woman being raped by this armed group,' that can be enough."

Sapir, a 24-year-old accountant, has become one of the Israeli police's key witnesses. She does not want to be fully identified, saying she would be hounded for the rest of her life if her last name were revealed.

In a two-hour interview outside a cafe in southern Israel, she recounted seeing groups of heavily armed gunmen rape and kill at least five women.

She said that at 8 a.m. on Oct. 7, she was hiding under the low branches of a bushy tamarisk tree, just off Route 232 ... She had been shot in the back. She covered herself in dry grass and lay as still as she could.

About 15 meters from her hiding place, she said, she saw motorcycles, cars and trucks pulling up. She said that she saw "about 100 men" (they) congregated along the road and passed between them assault rifles, grenades, small missiles – and badly wounded women.

"It was like an assembly point," she said.

The first victim she said she saw was a young woman with copper-color hair, blood running down her back, pants pushed down to her knees. One man pulled her by the hair and made her bend over. Another penetrated her, Sapir said, and every time she flinched, he plunged a knife into her back.

She said she then watched another woman "shredded into pieces." While one terrorist raped her, she said, another pulled out a box cutter and sliced off her breast. "One continues to rape her, and the other throws her breast to someone else, and they play with it, throw it, and it falls on

the road," Sapir said. She said the men sliced her face and then the woman fell out of view. Around the same time, she said, she saw three other women raped and terrorists carrying the severed heads of three more women.

Yura Karol, a 22-year-old security consultant, said he was hiding in the same spot, and he can be seen in one of Sapir's photos. . .In an interview, Mr. Karol said he barely lifted his head to look at the road but he also described seeing a woman raped and killed.

That same morning, along Route 232 but in a different location about a mile southwest of the party area, Raz Cohen – a young Israeli who had also attended the rave and had worked recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo training Congolese soldiers – said that he was hiding in a dried-up streambed. It provided some cover from the assailants combing the area and shooting anyone they found, he said in an hour-and-a-half interview in a Tel Aviv restaurant.

...He recalled, a white van pulled up and its doors flew open. He said he then saw five men, wearing civilian clothes, all carrying knives and one carrying a hammer, dragging a woman across the ground. She was young, naked and screaming.

"They all gather around her," Mr. Cohen said. "She's standing up. They start raping her. I saw the men standing in a half circle around her. One penetrates her. She screams. I still remember her voice, screams without words. Then one of them raises a knife and they just slaughtered her."

Shoam Gueta, one of Mr. Cohen's friends and a fashion designer, said the two were hiding together in the streambed. He said he saw at least four men step out of the van and attack the woman, who ended up "between their legs." He said that they were "talking, giggling and shouting," and that one of them stabbed her with a knife repeatedly, "literally butchering her." *So evidence coberated by two men.*

In interviews, four members of the first wave of volunteer emergency medical technicians said that they discovered bodies of dead women with their legs spread and underwear missing – some with their hands tied by rope and zipties – in the party area, along the road, in the parking area and in the open fields around the rave site.

Similar discoveries were made in two kibbutzim, Be'eri and Kfar Aza. Eight volunteer medics and two Israeli soldiers told The Times that in at least six different houses, they had come across a total of at least 24 bodies of women and girls naked or half naked, some mutilated, others tied up, and often alone.

A paramedic in an Israeli commando unit said that he had found the bodies of two teenage girls in a room in Be'eri.

One was lying on her side, he said, boxer shorts ripped, bruises by her groin. The other was sprawled on the floor face down, he said, pajama pants pulled to her knees, bottom exposed, semen smeared on her back.

Because his job was to look for survivors, he said, he kept moving and did not document the scene. Neighbors of the two girls killed – who were sisters, 13 and 16 – said their bodies had been found alone, separated from the rest of their family.

The Israeli military allowed the paramedic to speak with reporters on the condition that he not be identified because he serves in an elite unit.



Shari Mendes, an architect who was called up as a reserve soldier to help handle the bodies of female troops, in a container used to hold bodies before their removal to a morgue at the Shura military base in central Israel.

Many of the dead were brought to the Shura military base, in central Israel, for identification. Here, too, witnesses said they saw signs of sexual violence. Shari Mendes, an architect called up as a reserve soldier to help prepare the bodies of female soldiers for burial, said she had seen four with signs of sexual violence, including some with “a lot of blood in their pelvic areas.”

Captain Maayan, who worked at the same identification center, said that she had seen at least 10 bodies of female soldiers from Gaza observation posts with signs of sexual violence. Captain Maayan asked to be identified only by her rank and surname because of the sensitivity of the subject. She said she had seen several bodies with cuts in their vaginas and underwear soaked in blood and one whose fingernails had been pulled out.

The Israeli authorities have no shortage of video evidence from the Oct. 7 attacks. But Moshe Fintzy, a deputy superintendent and senior spokesman of Israel's national police, said, "We have zero autopsies, zero,"

Mr. Fintzy said Israeli security forces were still finding imagery that shows women were brutalized. Sitting at his desk at an imposing police building in Jerusalem, he swiped open his phone, tapped and produced the video of the two soldiers shot in the vagina, which he said was recorded by Hamas gunmen and recently recovered by Israeli soldiers.

A colleague sitting next to him, Mirit Ben Mayor, a police chief superintendent, said she believed that the brutality against women was a combination of two ferocious forces, "the hatred for Jews and the hatred for women." *That's about the size of it.*

The trauma from sexual assault can be so heavy that sometimes survivors do not speak about it for years, several rape counselors said. "Many people are looking for the golden evidence, of a woman who will testify about what happened to her. But don't look for that, don't put this pressure on this woman," said Orit Sulitzeanu, executive director of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel.

"The corpses tell the story."

The mills of God, they grind exceeding slow, but they grind exceeding small. Just as Nazi's who committed atrocities in the Concentration camps were still hunted down until recently (they must all be dead of natural causes now) so must there be a Nuremburg style War Crime trial for these men, not matter if it takes a few years to track them down. If they survive they will boast. It will be known.